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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### WINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY, OTHER DATA, INDICATE DECLINE IN ATLANTIC DUCK POPULATION

A decline in the numbers of the black duck, mallard, and scaup is forecast for the Atlantic Flyway this year, the Department of the Interior reports. Serious declines are predicted also in the number of canvasback, redhead, ringneck, and most other ducks in the Flyway. A less serious decline is expected in Canada geese. The one bright spot is brant, which may show an increase as high as 20 percent.

Because of this gloomy outlook the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, recommended to the Secretary of the Interior that he shorten the waterfowl hunting season by 10 days. Hence the hunters in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida will have 60 days of hunting compared to 70 days last year.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife based its recommendations on available data at the time of regulations decision, all of which was discouraging. The winter waterfowl survey, the nesting surveys in the Northeastern States, data on redhead and canvasback from Canadian nesting grounds--all pointed to a pronounced decline in the number of birds which would be available to the hunters in the eastern Flyway.

Birds come into the Atlantic Flyway from the tip of the Seward Peninsula in Alaska to the shores of Newfoundland, some 4,000 miles to the eastward. Although breeding ground surveys are conducted in the western prairie and parkland breeding areas adequate survey methods have not yet been developed for the eastern Canadian breeding range composed of Quebec, Labrador, Newfoundland, and eastern Ontario. Thus Atlantic Flyway breeding ground data are less complete than are data for the three western Flyways.

The January 1958 survey of wintering areas showed the population of ducks in the Atlantic States at the lowest point in the past 10 years. The decrease occurred in all the important species. The black duck index was 41 percent below 1957 and 5 percent below the peak reached in 1953. Mallard decreased 54 percent from last year and 56 percent from the peak; canvasback decreased 57 percent from last year and was 83 percent below the peak. Ringneck decreased 28 percent and was 76 percent from the high mark; scaup was 76 percent below its recent high. The coot population was down. A 14 percent decrease was noted in wintering Canada goose numbers but brant population was up 20 percent.

More than half of the nesting areas between Maine and West Virginia which were checked prior to the regulations meeting showed a decline in reproduction and the third which showed an increase did not compensate for the losses. Black duck production in these States was down more than 25 percent; mallard production down 17 percent; blue-winged teal, 31 percent; wood duck, 7 percent.

The total kill of ducks in the Atlantic Flyway in the 1957-58 season is estimated at 1,590,000, including a minimum of 290,000 not retrieved. This kill was nearly 10 percent lower than the harvest of 1956-1957. The estimated kill of black ducks last year was 288,000 compared with 345,000 taken the previous year. The estimated mallard take was 262,000, six percent below the previous year and the canvasback kill of about 73,000 was 26 percent down from the 1956-57 figure.

The goose kill (retrieved) in the 1957-58 season was 131,000 or 66 percent above the kill of the previous year. Most of the increase was with the Canada goose, the 1957-58 kill being 98,400 compared with 59,000. The brant kill was 6,300 or 10,000 ahead of the year previous. The harvest of coots was 126,000, about five percent down from the 1956-57 figure.

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